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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 6 July 2005, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Hachani (Vice-President) ..... (Tunisia)

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Towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration (E/2005/56)

1. **The President** said that the theme for the coordination segment, "Towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration", was also closely related to the theme of the high-level segment, in an effort to bring greater thematic coherence to the various segments of the substantive session. The segment would address the role of the United Nations system in supporting the national efforts to implement the development agenda that had emerged from the conferences and summits of the past 15 years.

2. The United Nations system assisted many countries in achieving internationally agreed development goals, and to perform that role effectively, its organizations must align their activities around the goals, as should Governments. That would be a first step in creating synergies among the activities of United Nations system organizations as well as with national strategies and policies. The report of the Secretary-General contained in E/2005/56 provided important insights into what the system was doing to respond to those challenges. Discussion should focus on what was required from the United Nations system in assisting developing countries in their endeavours to adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to the achievement of the international development goals.

3. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) said that the issue before the Council required action along two distinct but interconnected dimensions: policy coherence and cooperation for development. The first dimension involved the elaboration of the policy framework needed to ensure a coherent, integrated approach to achieving the development agenda. The second dimension entailed the role of United Nations organizations in helping countries to achieve the development goals.

4. The Secretary-General's report highlighted progress and major challenges on two main fronts: first, achieving greater coherence in policy development and in actual programmes and operations, and, secondly, sequencing their interventions to optimize the impact of their support on realizing the agenda. It emphasized the importance of developing a coherent and integrated policy framework for national implementation of the agenda and the key role the United Nations system could play in developing that framework, but it also recognized the need for the system itself to evolve in order to become the cohesive force for progress and change that current challenges demanded.

5. The pace of progress would depend on action at both inter-agency and intergovernmental levels. At the inter-agency level, the system should pursue the changes in policies and practices necessary to further align their work with both the goals and outcomes sought. The central message of the report of the Chief Executives Board (CEB), presented to the Council during the high-level segment, was that the common effort demanded by the Millennium Declaration and the United Nations development agenda had facilitated the evolution of a more coordinated, cohesive and functional system, yet it still faced the challenge of transforming its diversity and complexity into a source of strength that enabled it to respond in a flexible but concerted way to the challenges posed by the evolving international environment and the changing needs of developing countries.

6. At the intergovernmental level, there was a lack of a comprehensive, integrated process to review and assess overall progress in implementing the development agenda. The same sectoral approaches that too often prevailed within national Governments for dealing with development issues still tended to prevail in the United Nations system, hampering its ability to advance the agenda in a comprehensive, mutually reinforcing way. The Council and its functional commissions must take the lead in forging thematic coherence in their work by organizing it around the basic elements of the development agenda. Because of the breadth of its mandate, the Council was especially well placed to serve as an instrument for harmonizing the many ongoing assessment and monitoring exercises.

7. The proposals for annual ministerial-level peer reviews and for convening a biennial development cooperation forum were intended to strengthen the Council's capacity to exercise the strong leadership

that those responsibilities demanded. The Council might also wish to give further consideration to the proposal to plan meetings with the Bureaus of the governing bodies of United Nations system organizations and to review the timing and context of its examination of the CEB annual reports in order to integrate them effectively into the debate on system coordination.

8. **Ms. Taylor Roberts** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that coordination had emerged as a central issue in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. She stressed the importance of the regional dimension in support of the Goals. In fact, it seemed that an effort had begun to effect the greater coordination required. The Secretary-General's report highlighted the approach to coordination and strategic planning being pursued by the three Rome-based agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), through the United Nations System Network on Rural Development and Food Security.

9. While the need for coordination had been recognized, the overall United Nations system had not yet internalized the cultural and organizational change required to give operational effect to it. There was a tendency to continue to assess and even to fund the system on the basis of specific programme outputs, resulting in competition among organizations for declining resources. The situation was made worse as an increasing proportion of the budget was funded from voluntary resources. In that situation, programmes were influenced significantly by donor objectives and preferences.

10. The achievement of the internationally agreed development goals required coordination, coherence and collaboration not only within the United Nations system but with other multilateral institutions, including the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The annual meeting of the Council with those organizations therefore took on great significance.

11. Higher levels of coordination across the system placed even greater demands on the Council, given its role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination. A coordinated approach to the budget was also required. Efforts should be made to bring the Bretton Woods institutions under improved governance structures and into closer collaboration with the United Nations system. The Council should also address the long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation of countries in post-conflict situations.

12. **Mr. O'Neill** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, said that the European Union was strongly committed to the implementation of the outcomes of the conferences in the economic, social, environmental and related fields, and in particular to the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It remained committed to promoting the integration of the three components of sustainable development — economic development, social development and environmental protection — as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars.

13. The United Nations system had been expanding over time in scale and scope of activities, leading to significant duplication of mandates and actions between different bodies. The European Union supported the Secretary-General's efforts to pursue reform and ensure that the United Nations system was fit for the twenty-first century: relevant, coherent, adequately funded and effective. The September 2005 summit should give a clear mandate for further streamlining of the system. The European Union also supported the Secretary-General's appeal for a more integrated environmental governance structure, based on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with a revised and strengthened mandate.

14. The Council should play a central role in the follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and should provide policy guidance and an institutional framework for their integrated analysis and mainstreaming. It should continue to support policy coordination and harmonization among operational as well as humanitarian agencies. To improve its effectiveness and relevance, it could meet as a high-level development cooperation forum, where global, regional and national strategies could be reviewed, and voluntary peer reviews of the Goals could be

conducted. It also had contributions to make in post-conflict situations and humanitarian crises, but its role should remain at the level of policy coordination and review, rather than direct intervention.

15. The Chief Executives Board (CEB) should continue to execute its role in giving coordinated and coherent guidance to the United Nations system. The Board should support the full implementation of the operational reform agenda to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations system at the country level. The European Union would be interested to hear how CEB and the relevant Executive Committees, in particular the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), would work together to oversee and coordinate further reform of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

16. The functional commissions should continue to have primary responsibility for the review and assessment of progress made in implementing conference outcomes, while streamlining and improving consistency in their work. Engagement with civil society and the private sector was also important.

17. At the country level, the United Nations should be seen as operating as one team under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. In line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, country teams should ensure alignment of programmes with comprehensive national development strategies reflecting country priorities and harmonized with bilateral donors. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) should be the mechanism for alignment with national strategies and the UNDAF results matrix should provide the means by which the United Nations contribution to those strategies could be evaluated. All members of UNDG and the specialized agencies must support the Resident Coordinator in promoting system-wide coherence of actions to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and improve cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions.

18. **Mr. Chulkov** (Russian Federation) expressed his country's support for the interlinked approach to the goals, challenges and instruments of the United Nations development agenda, as presented in the Secretary-General's report. He said that achievement of the development goals also required the integration of United Nations policies and programmes with the national priorities and strategies of Governments, under the main responsibility of the Economic and Social Council as the key coordination mechanism for development within the United Nations system.

19. The Russian Federation therefore supported the further strengthening of the Council, which was especially well placed to serve as a platform for monitoring progress in achieving the United Nations development agenda, fostering ongoing dialogue on implementation and generating ideas on best ways of encouraging national and international development, including financing. His country was thus in favour of the proposals to hold a high-level development cooperation forum during the Council's sessions, for which it favoured the high-level segment of its substantive sessions rather than the operational activities segment, and to conduct under its aegis annual ministerial-level assessments, rather than peer reviews of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

20. The proposal to convene timely meetings to ensure coordinated responses to natural disasters and to address other issues having implications for the achievement of development goals was also a sound one and, like all of the other initiatives mentioned, did not require a radical revision of the structure and timing of the Council's sessions. Indeed, any major change in that respect would have very negative consequences for the Council's political role and efficiency.

21. The Russian Federation recognized the need to ensure the thematic coherence of the work of the Council and its functional commissions, which were a key mechanism for following up major conferences and summits and had a role to play not only in reporting but also in making an analytical and policy contribution to implementation. Their working methods should therefore be optimized, but not necessarily in uniform ways.

22. He stressed in that regard the role of CEB in orienting the action of the system and that of UNDG in increasing coordination of its work at country level, and he expressed support for efforts to strengthen interaction between the Council and international financial and trade institutions.

23. In conclusion, he said that the high-level segment of the session had made an important contribution to preparation of the September 2005 summit and that, while agreement had not been reached on the draft

ministerial declaration, the negotiations had proved highly productive by focusing attention on the social and economic agenda of the summit.

24. **Mr. Gass** (Switzerland) emphasized the strong interrelation between achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of all the internationally agreed development goals, observing that the Council had a crucial role to play in coordinating them. That role could be strengthened only through a coherent approach to the ways in which the Council complemented the General Assembly, which had to continue to be the body where overall policy was set, while the Council provided the forum for its implementation, within the areas of its mandate.

25. The Council's effectiveness depended on its links with its subsidiary commissions, but also with the operational units of the United Nations system. It should build more systematically on the work of its functional commissions, in particular by harmonizing their multi-year work programmes and cycles and integrating the results of their deliberations into its work.

26. In coordinating the operational entities of the United Nations system, the Council needed to ensure that the necessary instruments were in place to monitor implementation of General Assembly resolutions on operational activities. Those entities must, however, be able to use their own coordination mechanisms, such as UNDG, with the Council's support.

27. As a policy forum, the Council had also to bring the operational implications of their work to the attention of governing bodies of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, thus improving coherence between policy and operational activities.

28. Switzerland was not opposed to the proposal made in the Secretary-General's report concerning peer reviews but considered that a pilot process of voluntary peer reviews should first be launched in order to weigh their advantages and costs. As for the proposal that the Council could serve as a development cooperation forum for policy debate, Switzerland was open to such an initiative in the context or indeed in place of the high-level segment. Better use should be made of the forums and instruments already at the disposal of the Council and its commissions, and timely meetings on current and urgent issues could help raise international awareness and mobilize additional resources, while guarding against overlap with other United Nations system bodies.

29. In the common task of strengthening the Council's contribution to implementation of the international development agenda, the challenge lay not so much in finding consensus on new ideas as in taking forward steps already agreed upon.

30. **Mr. Ikouebe** (Republic of the Congo), after concurring with the views expressed on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Secretary-General's report was most timely in view of the need to gather new momentum in order to restore hope to many peoples in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

31. While indeed poverty eradication was not an unattainable goal, those countries needed greater impetus and more concrete commitments from the international community. The recommendations of the Committee for Development Policy at its seventh session were a welcome step in that direction.

32. Notwithstanding the general consensus within the international community, very few countries would be able to achieve the Goals set five years previously. Despite some significant progress, poverty, unemployment, disease, environmental degradation and gender-based discrimination remained widespread.

33. Considering in such a context that only coherent, concerted action based on a shared vision of development could meet the needs of an increasingly interdependent world, his country commended the combined efforts of United Nations system bodies, whose coordination by CEB could ensure that the Goals were better taken into account among the priorities of the system.

34. UNDG and other institutional networks for cooperation had also made an effective contribution to implementation of the Millennium Declaration thanks to the synergies established in many countries. His own country had thus benefited from the United Nations reform process, in particular through the Resident Coordinator country programme. That programme, piloted by the Government and involving all stakeholders, fully addressed all the concerns relating to achievement of the Goals. The major advantage of such an approach was that it served to stimulate national ownership of development efforts and to

encourage the development of partnerships to attain the Goals.

35. The Republic of the Congo therefore fully supported the reform process, which could enable significant advances to be made in combating poverty and hunger, and it welcomed the fresh impetus given to international development cooperation through the building of partnerships. The Secretary-General's recommendations for the strengthening of the Council were in the same spirit and could be expected, by ensuring greater coherence of its action, to help the developing countries to achieve the Goals.

36. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) noted that an important contribution of the Secretary-General's report was the idea that the comprehensive agenda for further improvement of the United Nations system needed to be monitored by the Council, whose work would thereby gain greater certainty and predictability, as called for by the Group of 77 and China. On the question raised by the European Union concerning the relationship between CEB and UNDG, he said that it was close and mutually reinforcing, as illustrated in particular by efforts to address the "triple threat" in southern Africa, where CEB had entrusted the implementation of the country-level response to UNDG. Another example was CEB discussion on field coordination, particularly with respect to the role of Resident Coordinators. Both the Secretary-General and the Chair of UNDG considered it that CEB had an important part to play in that discussion in order to maximize its support for action in the field.

37. **The President**, on conclusion of the general debate, drew the Council's attention to the draft decision submitted by him under the title "Theme for the coordination segment of the substantive work of the substantive session of 2006 of the Economic and Social Council and multi-year work programme for the coordination segment" (E/2005/L.13). He took it that the Council could adopt that draft decision, which would help bring more predictability and certainty to its work and also enable the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies to prepare their contributions thereto more effectively.

38. *It was so decided.*

39. Noting that the decision to be reached by the Council before the 2006 substantive session should probably concern a list of themes, with an indication of the year when they would be considered, he pointed out that other options for arriving at the complete list might be considered, as for instance the adoption of an indicative list of common themes from which the Council could choose its coordination segment theme on an annual basis.

40. He took it that the Council was ready to take note of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration" (E/2005/56).

41. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.